

Remarks by Ambassador Stephen D. Mull
Personal Democracy Forum Opening
Kino Praha, Warsaw
February 1, 2013

Thank you, Andrew. I appreciate this opportunity to welcome all of you today to the Personal Democracy Forum.

One of the hallmarks of Hillary Clinton's tenure as Secretary of State has been her championing of 21st Century statecraft – leveraging the technologies of our interconnected world to improve political participation and government accountability around the world.

Twenty-first century diplomacy is rooted in American values that embrace open markets, open societies and open governments. New information networks have altered power dynamics around the world and forced governments to respond. We are witnessing today a decentralization of power away from government and large institutions and toward networks of people.

And let me tell you that as a traditional diplomat who served in Poland during the 20th century – the 1980s and 1990s, I have returned here as a convert to 21st century diplomacy – it reflects the values of personal democracy that you are discussing here.

Before I was nominated in 2012 to be Ambassador to Poland, for instance, I had never used Twitter.

And I was skeptical when Secretary Clinton and others told me that I needed to use Twitter. But I can tell you today that it was some of the best advice that I received in Washington before coming to Poland.

Twitter has put me in touch with thousands of ordinary Poles, most of whom I probably would never have had contact with. And I have found that Twitter users aren't always diplomatic when they tell me their reactions to what the U.S. Ambassador Stephen Mull is doing or saying. People definitely do feel freer to express their real opinions on Twitter than they do face-to-face.

And it's also a great way for me to improve my Polish as when I tweeted last weekend that I was riding on top of a train. My fellow tweeters sensibly advised me to get in the train before I caught pneumonia.

Personal democracy at its most personal!!

But I know that new communications technology not only helps prevent diplomats from catching cold, but also keeps our societies healthy and vibrant and makes government, including diplomats, more dynamic and accountable to the people. As you know better than anyone, new media breakthroughs in the service of civic activism have helped support democracy movements in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and throughout the world.

As all of you here know -- better than anyone -- an open Internet is critical to this. The U.S. government believes that an open Internet fosters long-term peace, progress and prosperity; governments that block, censor or punish Internet activity not only discourage innovation and entrepreneurship but also sow the seeds of eventual revolution.

In closing, I would like to wish you every success during your discussions today and tomorrow. I look forward to hearing from you on Twitter and learning about how I and others can join you in using new communications technology to help solve social problems and promote democracy.

Thank you very much.